

## **THE SIRLEAF MARKET WOMEN'S FUND (SMWF) ANNUAL REPORT 2007**

### **1.0 Objectives of the Project**

1. To create a knowledge base regarding conditions of markets in the Liberian agriculture value chain and the situation and needs of women traders in Liberia.
2. To improve working conditions and service facilities in 10 markets initially—7 rural and 3 urban-- in different parts of the country by improving the infrastructure of markets to include credit, health, child care, storage and sanitary facilities and literacy. .
3. To expand the project to include 50 upgraded markets and assist 13,000 women traders, helping improve the incomes and wellbeing of farmers, traders and their families.

### **1.1 Progress and Status of Activities Implemented**

In 2007, its first operational year, and with support from the United Nations Development Program, the Survey of Markets and Marketers in Liberia was completed, the SMWF/Liberia was registered as a non-profit organization with its own Board, and an Executive Secretary and Accountant were appointed, housed in offices in Monrovia kindly contributed by the Ministry of Gender and Development.

Specific activities undertaken between January 2007 and December 2007 are as detailed below;

#### ***A Urban Markets***

##### **The Nancy Doe Market**

The first phase - the renovation of the entire market complex at The Nancy Doe Market has been completed and is in use by 1,000 market traders. The reconstruction included the provision of a children's play ground, running water and a power generator. This phase of the renovation work was dedicated by the President of the Republic of Liberia, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, on October 11, 2007. All illegal structures located on the market land have been demolished to pave way for the location of more marketers outside the main market building which is now not large enough to contain the growing number of marketers. The fund is also in the process of building a wall round the market to protect the land from encroachers as well as rehabilitating the drainage system and erecting additional stalls.

##### **Bardnersville Market**

The main market construction is almost completed but for the construction of a toilet facility and potable water. Arrangements have been made for the Public Works Ministry

to send officials to demolish all illegal structures located on the market land to make way for the construction of the toilets. The other outstanding issue is the payment for part of the land on which the market is located. A family is claiming ownership of part of the land and the fund is ready to pay for it. However, there is a disparity between the amount the family is quoting for the land and what the fund estimates the land should cost. The matter has been referred to the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy and SMWF is awaiting feedback in order to proceed. The market houses 1,100 traders who sell mostly foods; food processing also takes place there.

## ***B Rural Markets –***

### **Zorzor Market**

In spite of the bad road conditions, the Zorzor market has been completed. The project included the provision of toilet facilities, a bathroom and a store room. It is estimated that about 500 marketers use the market on market days. The President of the Republic of Liberia, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is expected to dedicate the market soon.

### **Totota Market**

The Totota market, not yet completed, was given land by the Daniel family who live there as their contribution, and the community provided the formal documentation. Some local women worked as foremen and casual laborers. The site supervisor attributed the delay experienced to the contractors' inability to secure transport to convey materials to the site. The site is not too far from Monrovia and has a relatively good road. It is expected that work will be completed and the market handed over to the marketers early this year. The following have been completed: the foundation, the retaining walls, the pillars and the beams, which are ready for roofing. (The market was completed and dedicated in early January 2008).

### **Logan Town Market**

Logan Town has an already existing market with about 850 traders. The problem however is the threat of eviction of the marketers because a family is claiming ownership of the land. The market has been in existence for more than 10 years and serves a large community. The SMWF has therefore purchased the plot of land on which the market is located. It paid US\$25,000 and the documentation on the land is being processed. Through the purchase about 2000 marketers have been saved from eviction. In addition, purchase of the land will pave the way for the UN to go ahead with a planned construction of a children's play ground. The agency was reluctant to undertake the construction in the absence of proper documentation on the land.

### **Zogolemai market**

The Zogolemai market in Johnstown project is an initiative by four communities in Lofa, and is being supported by the SMWF with a grant of US\$10,000. Construction work has

begun and the community is providing voluntary labour for construction. Some of the challenges identified were the bad road condition which made it difficult to transport materials from Monrovia to the site and the difficulty of managing volunteer labour given that the volunteers have other pressing priorities.

### **Saclepea market**

The construction work at the Saclepea Market has been partly completed. The structure for the market is very large because the contractor had expanded it to almost three times what was originally planned without consulting the fund (this happened before the SMWF Director was in place). This has raised the cost of the project beyond what was originally budgeted for it; the matter rests with the Board in Monrovia. The first phase is almost complete but for the provision of toilets, storage facility, potable water and a cover on the side to prevent water from entering the market when it rains.

### **Zwedru Market**

The roof has been renovated following delays caused by transportation of supplies during heavy rains. Marketers are working there again; the floor will be plastered and the whole market painted.

### **Gbarpolou Market**

The groundbreaking ceremony for this market for 1,000 traders took place in December, and the construction commenced.

## ***C Financial Summary***

In 2007, \$741,730 were transferred directly to the Market Fund in Liberia via the African Women's Development Fund in based in Accra, less administrative costs including bank charges and site visits expenses. (SMWF/Liberia thus records receiving US\$741,718). The market fund in Liberia received an additional \$30,000 grant from AWDF and \$50,000 from an individual donor. The outstanding balance has been earmarked to be used to complete the rest of the markets.

A financial report is available for details.

## **1.2 Impact of the Project – Social Change**

The project has brought about changes in the political, economic and social lives of the women:

Women make up a large majority of informal sector workers and the sheltered markets offer them a safe, secure and improved environment to work. "The (former) markets were deplorable. The structures used to leak. During the rainy season the surrounding areas were usually very muddy and slippery. Sometimes without rain boots it was impossible to walk around the market. There is a big difference now. No more rain beating me, no

more sun beating me and no more mud.” Deddeh Beyan, Market Superintendent of Bardnersville Market told staff during a site visit.

On the economic level, the project has secured the source of livelihood for thousands of women, struggling to make a living in post-conflict Liberia. By paying for land on which some markets have been located, renovating existing markets and building new ones, many women previously selling by the roadside or who were unemployed are being economically empowered and now contribute not only to the upkeep of their families but also to the development of the economy of Liberia.

The marketers now have a voice because through the project, they have been organised and have their own leadership. This is because the project required some organising right from the consultation stages. Also, the markets, after they have been handed over, require some leadership and management to be maintained. The consultation processes leading to the implementation of the project involved resolving conflicts. This has built the conflict resolution skills of these women. The marketers associations, especially through their leaders, can now make their opinions known and contribute to important decisions concerning them.

On the social level, the project has raised the contribution that the marketers are making to society. The health and welfare of marketers has been improved with the provision of sanitary conditions in which to operate. Similarly the inclusion of development programs such as crèche and literacy facilities have improved the general welfare of children. By providing their services in neat, well planned and laid out markets, the local communities where these markets are located now find selling in the market attractive. This has resulted in an increase in the number of marketers, creating the necessity for the expansion of the markets.

In addition to the above, the project is contributing to the improvement of the infrastructure of the country as the markets come with toilet facilities, storage, children’s playgrounds and other facilities.

### **1.3 Strategic Impact of the Project**

The Fund has become a catalyst for giving a more holistic approach to addressing the plight of this important sector of the economy. Already the Vice President’s office has asked UNDP to do a survey of the governance of the Marketing Association which will serve as a basis for strengthening the capacity of the women to run their own organization and have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. All parties that are now interested in building markets are referred to the Fund offices by Government in view of the comprehensive approach to market construction which includes buildings as well as education on literacy, health and care of children. UNICEF has also visited the markets and is interested in putting in a program on parenting that will help market women in their child care responsibilities. Thus the move to build markets that are people oriented is demonstrating the potential to attract other donors but also to change policies of government and donors on how to address the needs of the poor.

#### **1.4 Challenges facing Implementation of the Project**

Ongoing implementation is primarily challenged by the land issue, which needs to be addressed before any major investment can be done in those areas and also, some people encroaching on Market land are still resisting relocation.

Another challenge is the increased cost of building additional markets. According to SMWF, a rural market will now cost US\$100,000 instead of the US\$50,000 initially estimated. The construction of an urban market is now estimated to cost US\$300,000 instead of the US\$150,000 initially quoted.

#### **1.5 Next Steps - Activities Planned for 2008**

The Work Plan is presented in a separate report. It includes introducing adult learning courses to the marketers; an experienced trainer is already planning this assistance with economic literacy and other necessary skills. In addition, the World Council of Credit Unions is engaged in research toward setting up credit unions at the markets.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The partnership between the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund and the African Women's Development Fund has enabled the effective use of resources, both material and human. The collaboration ensured flexible and proactive responses to the fast changing environment in Liberia, thus ensuring as much as possible that the project met its overall targets. There were challenges of communication, dramatic currency fluctuations, new legislation regarding the international transfer of funds, and so on, which often resulted in delays. Nevertheless, these were minimized due to the support of AWDF, the UNDP, UNIFEM, and the Ministry of Gender, as well as the expertise available in individual ministries (engineers, for example) so that SWDF could address the multiple challenges arising in an economy and society deeply damaged by 14 years of civil war.